

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: IS, US, KU
SUBJ: KUWAITI REACTION TO CARTER/BEGIN TALKS

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. KUWAITI PRESS MARCH 23-26 MADE VARY LITTLE OF THE NEWS FROM WASHINGTON OF SHARP DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PRESIDENT CARTER AND ISRAELI PRI MIN BEGIN. EXTENSIVE WIRE-SERVICE REPORTS HAVE BEEN PRINTED IN ALL PAPERS, BUT ALMOST NO EDITORIAL COMMENT HAS APPEARED. COVERAGE CONVEYS IMPRESSION THAT A REAL DIVERGENCE HAS SURFACED BETWEEN USG AND ISRAELI POLICIES, BUT COMMENTATORS HAVE FAILED TO SEIZE ON THE NEWS AS GOOD (I.E., "AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL IS AT LAST FADING") OR BAD (I.E., "CARTER DIFFERS WITH BEGIN ORALLY, BUT DOES NOTHING TO ROLL BACK ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS.") END SUMMARY.

2. GOK MINISTER FOR CABINET AFFAIRS ABDUL AZIZ HUSSEIN TOLD A NEWSMAN (AL-QABAS, MARCH 24) THAT THE "NEGATIVE OUTCOME" OF THE CARTER-BEGIN TALKS WAS EXPECTED, SINCE "AMERICA'S TREATMENT OF ISRAEL ENCOURAGES...EXPANSION AND AGGRESSION" EVEN THOUGH ISRAEL KNOWS IT NEEDS AMERICAN SUPPORT. FOR HUSSEIN, THEN, THE SIGNIFICANT FACT OF THE CARTER-BEGIN MEETING WAS BEGIN'S WILLINGNESS TO DIFFER FUNDAMENTALLY
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WITH CARTER, THE IMPLICATION BEING EITHER THAT ISRAEL KNOWS IT IS ALREADY STRONG ENOUGH TO DISREGARD THE PRESIDENT'S WISHES, OR THAT ISRAEL IS SIMPLY IN THE HABIT OF DISREGARDING INTERNATIONAL OPINION.

3. THE PRESS HAS BEEN FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON EVENTS IN SOUTH LEBANON. AL RAI AL AM (MARCH 23) CHARGED PRES.

CARTER WITH HAVING FAILED, IN HIS TALKS WITH BEGIN, TO CURB ISRAELI ACTIVITY IN LEBANON. AL-QABAS (MARCH 26) DESCRIBES LEBANON AS A LABORATORY FOR "INTERNATIONAL EXPERIMENT," COMMENTING THAT THE VARIOUS ARAB IDEOLOGIES COMPETED THERE, UNTIL THIS COMPETITION WAS SUPERSEDED BY THE TWO-YEAR-LONG CONFLICT. EDITOR ENDS WITH NOTE THAT NEWEST EXPERIMENT IN LEBANON IS THAT OF REPLACING ISRAELI TROOPS WITH UN FORCES, WHICH, IF SUCCESSFUL, COULD SET A PATTERN FOR OTHER EXPERIMENTS "ELSEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE EAST." UNDER HEADLIN "ISRAELI ATTACK WAS PRE-PLANNED," PRESS MARCH 26 FRONTPAGES ARAFAT'S ALLEGATIONS THAT ISRAEL HAD PLANNED FOR YEARS TO TAKE SOUTH LEBANON, AND THAT THEUSG HAD IN ESSENCE GIVEN ITS BLESSING TO THE ISRAELI ACTION. ARAFAT IS QUOTED CHARACTERIZING THE CARTER-BEGIN CONTROVERSY AS NOTHING BUT POLITICAL PLAY-ACTING. NO EDITORIALISTS HAVE PICKED UP THIS LATTER THEME, HOWEVER.

4. ENGLISH-LANGUAGE KUWAIT TIMES, OFTEN CAUSTIC IN DESCRIBING AMERICAN POLICY, AND OFTEN SEEMINGLY CERTAIN THAT USG IS SUBSERVIENT TO ISRAELI WISHES, BROKE NEW GROUND MARCH 25 SAYING -- AND IS UNIQUE AMONG KUWAITI EDITORIALISTS IN MAKING THE POINT -- THAT THE CARTER/BEGIN TALKS SHOW THAT THE "AMERICAN-ISRAELI SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP IS ON TRIAL." EDITOR NOTES THE "LONG-PREVALENT MYTH ABOUT THE POWER AND STRENGTH OF THE ZIONIST LOBBY IN THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNITED STATES," AND ALLUDES TO PUBLIC OPINION POLLS SHOWING AN EROSION OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL. WRITER ASSERTS THAT THESE REPORTS, AND THOSE SHOWING THAT MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WERE ALLEGEDLY TOUGHER ON BEGIN THAN WHITE HOUSE WAS, JUSTIFY CONCLUSION THAT CARTER IS NOW FREE TO TAKE A HARD LINE WITH ISRAEL.

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5. COMMENT: WE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT NEWS OF THE DIFFICULT CARTER-BEGIN TALKS WOULD SPLIT COMMENTATORS HERE, WITH SOME ASSERTING THAT AT LAST ISRAEL HAD GONE TOO FAR, AND WAS ON THE WAY TO LOSING ESSENTIAL AMERICAN SUPPORT, AND OTHERS PROFESSING TO SEE THE VERBAL FIREWORKS AS IRRELEVANT TO THE FACT OF CONTINUING USG SUPPORT FOR WHATEVER ISRAEL WANTS. (ONE CARTOON IN MARCH 26 ARAB TIMES MAKE THE LATTER POINT, SHOWING CARTER AND VANCE AT ONE END OF A TABLE FURIOUSLY ANGRY WITH BEGIN AND DAYAN AT THE OTHER, WHILE VANCE'S FOOT PUSHES A STEADY STREAM OF HEAVY WEAPONS UNDER THE TABLE TO THE ISRAELIS.) HOWEVER, GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN HUSSEIN (PARA. 2 ABOVE), IN HIS FAILURE TO CHARACTERIZE THE WASHINGTON NEWS AS "GOOD" OR BAD", MAY HAVE SET THE TONE. KUWAITI EDITORIALISTS CANNOT APPLAUD A CARTER/BEGIN SHOWDOWN AS LONG AS THE PLO CONDEMNS ALLEGED USG FAILURE TO RESTRAIN THE ISRAELIS. AT THE SAME TIME THEY CANNOT IGNORE THE NEWS THAT USG HAS INDEED ACTED RAPIDLY AND FIRMLY TO GET THE ISRAELIS OUT OF LEBANON, AND THAT PRES. CARTER HAS PUBLICLY REITERATED FIRM STAND AGAINST PRI MIN BEGIN'S VIEWS ON SC RES. 242 AND ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS. FOR THE MOMENT THE KUWAITI PRESS STANDS ESSENTIALLY MUTE, CAUGHT

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IN THE APPARENT CONTRADICTION BETWEEN ITS "CONVENTIONAL WISDOM" AND THE EVIDENCE THAT THE USG REALLY DOES NOT, AFTERALL, BACK ISRAEL IN ALL IT DOES.

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